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McCollum meets with new Chinese ambassador

Discussion focuses on student visa issue

BY CHARLES HOMANS
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WASHINGTON — China's new ambassador to the United States met with Rep. Betty McCollum, D-St. Paul, Tuesday to discuss the problems Chinese nationals have obtaining student visas.

Chinese students "are not coming to the United States anymore for school — not because they don't want to, but because of bugs in the bureaucracy that deals with international students," McCollum said in an interview after the meeting Tuesday.

McCollum was the first member of Congress to meet personally with the ambassador, Zhou Wenzhong, who was appointed to the post last month. Chinese embassy spokesman Chu Maoming wouldn't elaborate on why Zhou Wenzhong made a priority of visiting the Minnesota lawmaker but said the diplomat was interested in "China's relations with Minnesota." China bought more than \$650 million in Minnesota products last year, according to Gov. Tim Pawlenty's office, and the University of Minnesota claims to have more Chinese students than any other university in the country.

McCollum's meeting with Zhou Wenzhong lasted about half an hour and touched briefly on trade and environmental issues as well. But the congresswoman said much of the conversation concerned student visas issues. Such visas have come under greater scrutiny since Sept. 11, 2001.

As a result, international student enrollment has declined at many colleges and universities in the United States, and Minnesota's are no exception. The University of Minnesota has seen its new international student enrollment drop from more than 1,000 in 2001 to 671 last year.

"We've noticed (the decline), especially in certain fields," said Joan Brzezinski, assistant director of the university's China Center. Brzezinski also said that enrollment in the Institute of Technology had suffered in particular.

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